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Statement by Jose Ramos-Horta,
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(CNRM)

Stop Press

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1. As it has been widely reported, the projected Portuguese parliamentary mission to East Timor has been "suspended". Portuguese officials maintain that, on their part, the mission is only "suspended" and not cancelled.

2. The official public reason was Indonesia´s objection to the inclusion of Jill Jolliffe in the list of foreign correspondents invited by the Portuguese side.

3. There were other reasons that influence the Portuguese decision. However these were not the determining factor. Inspite of the obvious concerns dramaticaly expressed by Bishop Belo (Bishop Belo called repeatedly for cancellation of the visit in two separate interviews with the Portuguse media) the Portuguese would have proceeded with the visit.

4. Portugal had made a number of concessions along the negotiation process to enable the visit to take place. However, these concessions were not over questions of principle.

5. Portugal was right in refusing to accept Indonesia´s veto. If Portugal were not to stand firm on such a fundamental question of principle its whole credibility and effectiveness would have been irreparably damaged.

6. I fully endorse the Portuguese stand.

7. We cannot lose sight of the fact that Indonesia is the culprit and we should direct our criticism at Indonesia.

8. Indonesia used the case of Jill Jolliffe as a convenient way to prevent the visit from taking place because it was conscious that, inspite the draconian measures it undertook to intimidate the people of East Timor, massive demonstrations would have taken place during the 12-day visit. The UN-sponsored parliamentary mission would have been a diplomatic defeat of huge proportions for Indonesia. On the basis of the information I have in my possession, I can state with confidence that the visit, inspite all the difficulties, would have ended in a complete public relations fiasco for Indonesia.

9. In the last few weeks prior to the visit, Indonesian security in East Timor had strongly advised Jakarta against the visit. Numerous recomendations were sent to President Suharto admitting the inability of the security forces to control the situation. It was then up to Foreign Minister Ali Alatas to find the excuse.

10. Portugal has made representations to the Secretary-General, all 15 members of the Security Council as well as other governments. At least one permanent member of the Security Council assured Portugal that it would veto Ali Alatas for Secretary-General.

11. I have urged the Portuguese to call for a meeting of the Security Council. All efforts have to be directed at getting the Security Council to look into the East Timor question. However, it is not enough for us to direct our efforts on Portugal. I would urge that solidarity groups and others to address letters to their respective governments calling on them to support a Security Council meeting on East Timor and to oppose Alatas for Secretary-General.

12. While I´m not hopeful that the parliamentary mission will proceed in the next few weeks, we must continue to insist that Indonesia lift the ban on Jill Jolliffe. I cannot agree that pressure should be put on Jill Jolliffe to withdraw. On such a fundamental question of principle we should be the last to call on Jill Jolliffe to withdraw. We would be directing our energies on the wrong target. Remember, Jill Jolliffe is only an excuse. Other obstacles existed. One, and not a minor one, was for instance Indonesia´s refusal to allow a non-Indonesian aircraft to carry the MPs. Portuguese attempts to charter a Thai commercial airliner were unsuccessful. The Thais responded that they could only book the Portuguese on a regular flight to Jakarta and then an Indonesian aircraft would have to be used. It was obvious that the Thais were conniving with the Indonesians to thwart the visit. The Indonesians also refused to allow the Portuguese to send pictures directly from East Timor. Instead all TV pictures would have to be sent via Jakarta.There were many other last minute difficulties of no minor importance created by the Indonesians to sabotage the visit. Hence, let´s not lose sight of the only culprit.

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